

By Len Barcousky
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(Ross Township, PA) — Ross police soon will be able to file reports and search law-enforcement databases without having to leave their patrol cars.

The township plans to buy new software and other communications equipment with \$400,000 in federal funds obtained through U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire.

Representatives of the McCandless Democrat presented township officials with a check for \$399,500.

“By allowing police to file reports and access key intelligence information from the field, this new technology will increase the amount of time they can spend out in the community, making sure families in Ross Township are safe,” Mr. Altmire said in a statement.

“This funding will be tremendous for us, because it will enable police to do reports from their cars,” police Chief Ralph Freedman said in a statement.

Ross police have to travel back to headquarters to file paperwork and research criminal files. The federal grant will allow the department to link its records management system to mobile computer terminals in patrol cars, Lt. Robert Bellan said.

The new system will give police in the field immediate access to criminal records and other background information while they are responding to calls, he said. The money also will be used to upgrade and improve security on the department's radio network.

He offered an example of how communications will be improved. The new system will allow police to get emergency messages out to officers when they are off duty, he said. “In cases like last year's summer floods, we can get hold of our guys quickly if we need more help,” he said.

"We're very excited about the grant and appreciate Rep. Altmire's help in securing it," Commissioners President Dan DeMarco said.

Commissioners Vice President Lana Mazur worked with Lt. Bellan to gather information and statistics showing the township's need for the new equipment, Mr. DeMarco said.

"Police officers dedicate themselves to protecting Ross Township, and they deserve to have all the necessary equipment to do their job," Mr. Altmire said.

The Ross grant was a so-called "earmark," requested by Mr. Altmire for inclusion in the 2008 consolidated appropriations bill approved by Congress.

As the number of earmarks has increased, the practice of adding them to federal budgets has created controversy, with critics pointing out that they add billions of dollars to federal spending.

The Ross grant resulted from a local request for aid, and it will improve police efficiency and boost public safety, a spokeswoman for Mr. Altmire said. "It's a valid need, and the congressman was glad to be an advocate for the federal funding," Tess Mullen said.

"I am very pleased that I could secure this funding to provide [police] with valuable tools that will make their crime-fighting efforts even more effective," Mr. Altmire said.